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Fw: Bee kill incident report
Thomas Steeger to: Norman Spurling 05/07/2012 05:53 AM

Beekill incident report.

----- Forwarded by Thomas Steeger/DC/USEPA/US on 05/07/2012 05:53 AM -----

From:	Steve Ellis <nhbabsellis@gmail.com>
To:	Thomas Steeger/DC/USEPA/US@EPA
Cc:	Thomas Moriarty/DC/USEPA/US@EPA, markmagnuson@state.mn.us
Date:	05/06/2012 11:28 PM
Subject:	Bee kill incident report

Dear Tom,

Attached please find an official report of the events related to the bee kill I spoke with you about last week. Please enter this in the EIIS data base.

Dave Fischer and Jerry Bromenshenk along with 2 BCS staff people want to come out to the site on Tuesday. I am planning on meeting them out in my yard.

Again, report was very similar to my 2010 report, involving the same physical location.

When I hear more from the MDA and or Bayer I will let you know.

Steve

Bee kill in stockpiled bees May 1, 2012.doc

Bee Kill incident in stockpile location Elbow Lake, MN –May 1, 2012
Official Incident Report to US EPA

Old Mill Honey Company operates roughly 2,300 hives of bees in Minnesota; during the summer months we operate principally for honey production, and in California during the winter principally for overwintering and paid almond pollination. April is a very busy month for us as the bees are transported from California to Minnesota.

On Tuesday May 1st 2012, in the early afternoon, while filming a news piece for NBC News, it became apparent that there was an abnormal mortality event in progress in the holding yard of bees. The beehives are located on an approximately 60 acre piece of property owned by a gravel company, currently not in active use. Bees were observed dead in front of the hives, as well as crawling on the ground unable to fly, some exhibited trembling and twitching on their backs unable to right themselves. The NBC film crew, as well as local reporter, Chris Ray of the Grant County Herald recorded these symptoms and took pictures of the dead and dying bees.

As a part of the NBC film piece, we met with a local farmer who shared with us the details of the corn variety he was planting, which is typical for this area. His seed bag label was a Pioneer variety, P9630AM1 containing "Liberty Link, Herculex XTRA, Poncho 1250, and Optimum Acre Max 1. The back of the seed bag tag read "This seed is treated at the manufacturer's recommended rates with Fludoxonil, Mefenoxam, Thiabendazole, and Azoxystrobin fungacides, Thiamethoxin and Clothianidin insecticides and Bacillus Firmus."

He mentioned that due to good seeding conditions he had been planting the night before, (April 30) until 12:30am to get the field seeded before the expected rain. Many other area farmers worked long into the night that night as well to get the corn planted.

As soon as I realized that this was a pesticide poisoning, I called John Peckham at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to report a bee kill and request a pesticide inspection to determine the responsible chemical. At 4:00 pm May 1st I left a voice mail for him to contact me regarding a bee kill incident.

Thursday May 3rd, the MDA sent out a field inspector Mark Magnuson to sample for pesticide poisoning. I met Mark at 11:00 am and led him to the bee location 4 miles east of Elbow Lake Minnesota. Mark put on a bee suit and insisted on being the only person to touch any of the sample material. He gathered up approximately 2 cups of freshly dead and dying bees, as well as 2 cups of freshly gathered dandelion pollen from combs within the hives next to the brood nest. Mark made efforts made to only scrape off the bright yellow pollen of Dandelions to ensure the sample would be of fresh pollen recently gathered, rather than older residual pollen from a previous date. A MDA case file was established: MUM-129001225.

Mark sampled dandelion pollen, because these weeds are heavily flowering at the borders of the corn fields, as well as many volunteers which were growing out in the fields. Bees had been gathering nectar and pollen primarily from this one source.

While gathering the dead and dying bees on Thursday with Mark, we observed many healthy bees attempting to fly off with dead or dying bees in an attempt to get them further away from the hives. One dead queen bee was found and placed with the other dead bees in the sample.

On Thursday, May 3rd I received a call from Iain Kelly of Bayer Crop Science (BCS). He had been informed at the PPDC meeting in Washington by David Hackenberg of my incident, and wanted to know some details. He asked if there were blooming crops or weeds present in the fields, and at the edges of fields. I told him yes, the fields were heavily peppered with blooming dandelions. I asked him if it is customary to have both Thiamathoxin and Clothianidin in a seed treatment, and he was surprised that both were being used together.

David Fischer of BCS called on Friday to follow up on this incident, and wanted to arrange for a site visit by himself and a bee expert. I indicated that I would be receptive as long as they would share any findings of theirs with me. He tentatively set up Tuesday May 8 for that inspection. He speculated that the seed treatment might have been improperly bonded if a second neonicitiniod was added in the seed dressing process.

There were 1,346 hives of honey bees present in the holding yard on May 1, 2012. The replacement value of these bees at this time of year would be $155 per hive or $208,630. Strength and long term viability of the hives is in question both for the upcoming honey production season as well as next season's pollination contracts. Strength and viability are critical factors for both endeavors. All of the hives exhibited unusual mortality symptoms described above.

Steve Ellis
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